



# Salton Sea Ecosystem Restoration Program

## Frequently Asked Questions

### What is the Salton Sea and why is it important?

The Salton Sea is California's largest lake. It is located in Riverside and Imperial counties. Created by a levee break along the Colorado River in 1905, the Sea supports a vibrant ecosystem that is one of the most important habitats for birds in North America.

Most of the water that now flows into the Salton Sea is agricultural drain water. Salts carried with this water dissolve and are trapped because there is no natural outlet. Unless actions are taken to address the Sea's increasing salinity and other water quality problems, it will be unable to support the fish and wildlife that rely upon it.

### What is the Salton Sea Ecosystem Restoration Program?

The Colorado River is a vital source of much of Southern California's water supply. Historically, California relied on surplus river water and water allocated to other states to meet its water demands. Discussions in the mid-1990s to reduce California's use of Colorado River water set the stage for the signing of the Quantification Settlement Agreement (QSA) in 2003.

Because the implementation of the QSA will cause significant impacts to the Salton Sea ecosystem, the California Resources Agency was directed to prepare an ecosystem restoration plan. State law also established the Salton Sea Advisory Committee, comprised of 32 members who represent a variety of interests in the Salton Sea. The committee provides recommendations to the Secretary for Resources on the restoration plan.

### How were the alternatives in the Draft Programmatic Environmental Impact Report (PEIR) selected?

The Resources Agency considered 27 groups of alternative plans involving hundreds of options that were aimed at improving habitat, addressing air quality impacts, and protecting water quality, objectives which are required by state law. The Draft PEIR includes eight alternatives that best meet the required objectives for restoring the health of the Sea and a No Action Alternative with two possible scenarios.

### What is the process for selecting the preferred alternative?

The Secretary for Resources will choose a preferred alternative to submit to the state Legislature based on recommendations from the Salton Sea Advisory Committee, input from stakeholders and interested agencies, and formal comments received during the public review period. The preferred alternative may be one of the alternatives evaluated in the Draft PEIR, or it may be a combination of several alternatives. Ultimately, the state Legislature is responsible for approving, implementing, and funding the preferred alternative.

### Once the preferred alternative is selected, what is the schedule for planning and construction of the project?

Due to a variety of factors, inflows to the Sea are expected to change over the 75-year study period. Some components in the identified alternatives cannot be constructed until the Sea recedes. Therefore, construction could extend for several decades. For the eight alternatives, the following four phases depict the actions that are likely to occur during the 75-year study period:

- **Phase I – 2006-2020:** Inflows would be relatively stable until 2018 when flows would decline due to QSA provisions. Planning and design activities would be completed in this phase. Construction would start by 2014 under most alternatives. Many alternatives would have some of the components in operation by 2018.
- **Phase II – 2020 to 2030:** Inflows would decline rapidly. Construction would be completed by this phase for most components.
- **Phase III – 2030 to 2040:** Inflows would be relatively stable. Construction of all facilities would be completed by the end of this phase.
- **Phase IV: 2040 to 2078:** Inflows would change slightly in this phase.

### What is the public's involvement in the process?

An extensive public outreach effort has been conducted to involve those directly affected by the restoration program. Over 30 public outreach meetings have been conducted in the Salton Sea watershed and other parts of the state. To keep the public apprised, brochures and project updates were distributed to the project mailing list.

Outreach efforts will continue with the release of the Draft PEIR. The document will be circulated for a 90-day review period, during which time there will be additional public workshops. Comments received during the review period will be responded to and included in the Final PEIR.

### Where can I find more information?

The Resources Agency has a website, [www.salttonsea.water.ca.gov](http://www.salttonsea.water.ca.gov) dedicated to the Salton Sea Ecosystem Restoration Program. This site provides the documents related to the Restoration Program, as well as information on upcoming public workshops.

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